

# Public Opinion on Abortion in Eight Mexican States amid Opposition to Legalization

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*In opposition to Mexico City's legalization of first-trimester abortion, 17 Mexican states (53 percent) have introduced initiatives or reforms to ban abortion entirely, and other states have similar legislation pending. We conducted an opinion survey in eight states—four where constitutional amendments have already been approved and four with pending amendments. Using logistic regression analyses, we found that higher education, political party affiliation, and awareness of reforms/initiatives were significantly associated with support for the Mexico City law. Legal abortion was supported by a large proportion of respondents in cases of rape (45–70 percent), risk to a woman's life (55–71 percent), and risk to a woman's health (48–68 percent). A larger percentage of respondents favored the Mexico City law, which limits elective legal abortion to the first 12 weeks of gestation (32–54 percent), than elective abortion without regard to gestational limit (14–31 percent). (STUDIES IN FAMILY PLANNING 2011; 42[3]: 191–198)*

On 24 April 2007, the Mexico City Legislative Assembly legalized first-trimester elective abortion in the capital, allowing any woman—regardless of her state of residence—to access abortion services. The reform and the accompanying Mexico City Ministry of Health (MOH) legal abortion program became models for much of the region (Sánchez Fuentes et al. 2008). A 2008 Supreme Court ruling rejecting a constitutional challenge and upholding the Mexico City law, however, catalyzed opposition to the reform.

To date, all 31 Mexican states and Mexico City allow abortion in cases of rape and under limited circumstances that vary from state to state. Prior to 2008, termination of pregnancy was permitted when the pregnancy entailed risk to a woman's life (29 states), in cases of severe fetal

malformation (14 states), when the pregnancy endangered a woman's health (11 states), and for other reasons (12 states) such as when a woman did not have the financial means to support a child (Yucatan state) (GIRE 2011a).

In 1999 in the Mexican state of Baja California, the "Paulina Case" illustrated that even those states purportedly granting access to abortion in cases of rape often deny such access. A 13-year-old named Paulina who was raped was denied access to a legal abortion and forced by the Ministry of Health in Baja California to continue the pregnancy. This same state was the first to initiate restrictive reforms (in October 2008), modifying its constitution to protect lives from the moment of conception. By early 2009, 8 Mexican states had already passed similar reforms or had initiatives pending; as of July 2011, 17 states have passed such reforms and others have initiatives pending (GIRE 2011b).

Given the ever-changing sociopolitical climate in Mexico and the region generally, and its effect on abortion amendments, understanding public opinion on this controversial topic and correlates of opinion is critical. Abortion public opinion research can be a valuable tool for assessing whether current constitutional amendments reflect public opinion, and can inform advocacy work (García et al. 2004; Yam, Dries-Daffner, and García 2006; García et al. 2007). Since 2000, the government of Mexico has become more responsive to public opinion on various issues, including abortion (Yam, Dries-Daffner, and

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García 2006). The National Supreme Court, for example, reviewed findings from public opinion studies conducted in 2007 and 2008 in Mexico City (among other ethical, public health, and legal arguments) to inform its 2008 decision to uphold the constitutionality of the Mexico City law (GIRE 2011b; Wilson et al. 2011).

The published studies on abortion public opinion using representative samples show that the Mexican public generally views a greater number of circumstances as acceptable grounds for obtaining an abortion than the number permitted under current constitutional amendments (Núñez-Fernández, Shrader-Cox, and Benson 1994; CDD 2004; Palermo et al. 2009). The first nationally representative public opinion study concerning abortion conducted in Mexico in 2000, for example, found that the majority of respondents believed abortion should be legal when the woman's life is at risk (82 percent), when her health is at risk (76 percent), when the pregnancy resulted from rape (64 percent), and in cases of severe fetal malformation (53 percent) (García et al. 2004). The vast majority of respondents self-reported as Catholics, yet, reflecting the predominantly secular character of Mexican society, expressed the belief that the woman or couple should make the final decision to have an abortion, not the Church, a physician, or another individual or entity (Becker, García, and Larsen 2002; García et al. 2004). Factors reported to be significantly associated with more favorable views about abortion include being male, attending religious services less frequently, and attaining a higher level of education (Becker, García, and Larsen 2002; García et al. 2004). In Mexico City, a series of pre- and post-reform public opinion studies indicated a steady increase in public support for the 2007 reform once it passed; favorable public opinion jumped from 38 percent three weeks prior to the reform to 63 percent and 73 percent in 2008 and 2009, respectively (Wilson et al. 2011). In both the 2008 and 2009 surveys, education and less frequent religious service attendance remained significant predictors of support for the Mexico City law; being male was significantly associated with a more favorable opinion in 2008 but not in 2009 (Wilson et al. 2011).

Challenges to abortion rights outside the capital pose questions concerning public knowledge and opinion regarding abortion and the latest reforms in the states that have passed constitutional amendments to ban abortion. For example, are the majority of citizens in the various abortion-contested states supportive of or opposed to such constitutional amendments, and what are some of the correlates of attitudes concerning abortion? This study's aims are to: (a) describe public opinion regarding abortion and the new initiatives/reforms in those states, and (b) determine the extent to which awareness of the

reforms/initiatives (regardless of information source) and other variables are associated with a favorable (or unfavorable) opinion about first-trimester elective abortion (the Mexico City law). Findings from this study will be useful for informing public policy regarding legal abortion in Mexico and access to services at the state and national level.

## Methods

The abortion debate in Mexico varies by region: the central states (near the capital city) and southern states bordering Central America (the poorest in the country in terms of human development indexes) tend to be more religious and hold more conservative views vis-à-vis women's roles and abortion. The northern states (more economically prosperous and bordering the United States) tend to hold more progressive and liberal views on abortion. The states chosen for this study are geographically diverse and scattered throughout the country.

In March 2008, a Mexican NGO, Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida (GIRE), and the Population Council's Mexico office carried out a public opinion survey in the first eight states in Mexico that either proposed initiatives to modify abortion laws (Queretaro, State of Mexico, Tabasco, and Veracruz) or passed reforms (Baja California, Colima, Morelos, and Sonora). Each state included multistage stratified random sampling, independent for rural and urban areas ( $n = 800$  per state). The margin of error is  $\pm 3.5$  (95 percent confidence interval). We used Geostatistic Areas (AGEBs), which were created by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information (INEGI) for the XII Mexican census, as the primary sampling units. The selection of AGEBS was proportional to the size of the population aged 18 or older. Then we selected a block and a household following a systematic sampling technique. Finally, we chose one participating woman or man aged 18–95 in each household. The response rate varied by state and ranged from 25 percent to 69 percent. Participants were not reimbursed for answering survey questions.

The core questions in each survey were identical, but state-specific questions about local reforms and legal initiatives were included at the end. Respondents in Baja California, Colima, Morelos, and Sonora, for example, were asked about "recent changes in abortion law," whereas those in Queretaro, the State of Mexico, Tabasco, and Veracruz were asked about "initiatives to change current abortion laws." The surveys included questions on sociodemographic characteristics, knowledge of constitutional amendments concerning abortion, opinion re-

garding circumstances under which abortion should be legal, and opinion regarding initiatives to change abortion legislation. Participants were questioned through face-to-face interviews that took approximately one hour. In accordance with the guidelines set forth by the Population Council's Institutional Review Board, this study was exempt from full committee review, but we ensured anonymity through the use of blinded patient identifiers.

The data from the eight separate surveys (one per state) were initially entered into eight separate databases in SPSS 15.0. We then merged the data into one large database for analysis. We performed univariate analysis to obtain descriptive characteristics. We conducted bivariate analysis using chi-square tests to confirm significant associations between favorable (or unfavorable) opinion about first-trimester elective abortion and sociodemographic characteristics: sex, age, years of schooling, place of residence (rural/urban), current marital status, number of children, occupation, religion, religious service attendance, and political party affiliation. We then tested three logistic regression models. The bivariate outcome of interest was whether respondents supported or opposed the legalization of first-trimester elective abortion (the Mexico City law).

We then conducted multivariate logistic regression analyses using three models. Because each state varies both sociopolitically and in the extent to which information about the reform initiative was publicized, Model 1 examines the effect of state of residence and awareness of the reform initiative on abortion opinion. Model 2 includes the above variables and controls for all significant (at  $p < 0.05$ ) sociodemographic variables from the bivariate analysis. Model 3 includes all the above variables plus political party affiliation. All political parties in the country were included, with an emphasis on the three most influential ones: Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), a historically conservative party with an antichoice platform; Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), a left-wing party that spearheaded the effort to pass the Mexico City law in 2007; and Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), a center party with a generally conservative voting record on abortion. The other political parties included much smaller representation (for example, the Green Party). The reference category was having no political party affiliation.

## Results

Of the 6,397 participants who completed the survey, the average age was 39 (range: 18–95) years. Slightly more women (52 percent) than men participated in the study

(see Table 1). Most participants were currently married (71 percent); 22 percent had never been married. Most participants (64 percent) had not received schooling beyond the ninth grade. The majority (77 percent) had at least one child. Forty-six percent were currently working, 31 percent were homemakers, and the remainder were students, retired, or unemployed. Eighty-three percent self-identified as Catholic, and 51 percent of the sample reported that they attended religious services frequently (once a week or more).

## Knowledge and Opinion of Abortion Law

Twenty-three percent of the respondents reported awareness of their state's reforms or initiatives to change the legal status of abortion (see Table 2). The highest percentage of awareness was in Baja California (43 percent), the first state to approve a reform. Percentages were lower elsewhere, especially in those states with initiatives still pending: Queretaro (15 percent), State of Mexico (18 percent), Tabasco (28 percent), and Veracruz (18 percent).

When asked about abortion under specific circumstances, participants expressed greater support for a woman's right to a legal abortion in the more extreme circumstances, although this varied by state. For example, the majority (65 percent) supported abortion when the pregnancy posed a risk to the woman's life (range: 55 percent in Tabasco to 71 percent in Sonora), when the pregnancy posed a grave risk to the woman's health (60 percent; range: 48 percent in Tabasco to 69 percent in Baja California), and in cases of rape (60 percent; range: 45 percent in Tabasco to 70 percent in the State of Mexico) and severe fetal malformation (60 percent; range: 48 percent in Tabasco to 68 percent in Sonora). Participants expressed less support for abortions obtained under less dire circumstances, such as when a woman requests an abortion because she does not have the financial means to support another child (28 percent; range: 20 percent in Tabasco to 33 percent in the states of Mexico and Morelos) or when her contraceptive method failed (23 percent; range: 13 percent in Tabasco to 27 percent in the states of Mexico and Colima). Support for a woman's right to an elective abortion without restrictions during any phase of the pregnancy was low (26 percent; range: 14 percent in Tabasco to 31 percent in Morelos and the State of Mexico). When asked their opinion about the Mexico City law (elective abortion within the first 12 weeks of gestation), 44 percent of the participants said they were in support of that law (range: 32 percent in Sonora to 54 percent in Morelos).

**Table 1** Percentage distribution of survey respondents, by selected characteristics, according to state of residence, Mexico, 2009

Characteristic	Total sample	States where constitution was modified				States with initiatives to modify constitution				In favor of abortion during first 12 weeks
		Baja California	Colima	Morelos	Sonora	Queretaro	State of Mexico	Tabasco	Veracruz	
Sex										
Male	47.9	50.9	48.5	46.2	49.5	46.7	47.5	46.8	46.8	44.0
Female	52.1	49.1	51.5	53.8	50.5	53.3	52.5	53.2	53.2	44.1
Age (years)										
18–19	5.4	4.6	4.9	6.9	5.0	6.2	5.7	5.6	4.4	47.2
20–29	29.2	31.6	28.4	28.7	28.1	28.5	29.9	33.6	24.5	50.4
30–39	21.6	24.3	20.3	18.8	20.9	23.3	22.1	20.1	23.0	45.1
40–49	19.2	16.6	19.5	19.5	20.3	18.5	19.6	18.1	22.0	43.3
50–59	11.1	13.0	11.2	10.8	11.7	11.0	9.8	10.9	10.5	38.0
60+	13.4	9.8	15.7	15.3	13.8	12.5	12.8	11.7	15.7	33.5
Years of schooling										
≤9	64.2	53.8	69.8	59.8	66.0	64.3	56.0	70.0	74.1	40.2
10+	35.8	46.2	30.2	40.2	34.0	35.7	44.0	30.0	25.9	51.0
Marital status										
Never married	22.0	19.4	22.0	22.4	21.8	24.5	23.9	20.7	20.9	34.8
Currently married	71.0	72.0	70.2	70.5	67.3	71.1	68.9	74.3	74.0	43.5
Formerly married	7.0	8.6	7.8	7.1	10.9	4.4	7.2	5.0	5.1	48.7
Number of children										
At least one	76.6	74.6	77.8	74.3	79.6	76.5	74.3	77.8	77.7	42.4
None	23.4	25.4	22.2	25.7	20.4	23.5	25.7	22.2	22.3	49.5
Occupation										
Currently working	45.9	48.5	43.8	47.3	47.4	45.8	48.6	43.9	41.8	45.2
Homemaker	31.3	25.3	33.0	31.1	27.8	32.2	28.6	35.9	36.4	42.3
Student	6.8	7.2	6.9	5.7	5.7	5.0	10.2	6.6	7.3	51.2
Retired	4.6	6.0	5.7	5.4	7.7	3.2	3.1	2.2	3.2	38.2
Unemployed	11.4	13.0	10.5	10.5	11.5	13.6	9.5	11.4	11.2	42.2
Religion										
Catholic	82.6	74.6	92.2	79.4	86.0	90.9	80.0	73.5	84.5	44.2
Other	11.7	12.3	6.9	14.1	7.9	6.1	10.5	22.4	13.6	42.8
None	5.6	13.2	1.0	6.5	6.1	3.0	9.5	4.1	1.9	44.7
Religious service attendance										
Almost never or never	18.1	26.6	12.6	19.9	25.8	9.9	27.1	14.0	8.8	44.9
Once per month	31.4	31.7	23.7	35.9	31.4	37.4	37.5	24.3	29.7	48.0
Frequently	50.5	41.7	63.7	44.3	42.8	52.8	35.4	61.7	61.4	41.3
Political party affiliation										
Partido Acción Nacional	19.6	33.0	23.6	22.3	19.9	25.5	14.6	8.9	8.9	47.8
Partido Revolucionario Institucional	29.4	32.3	35.8	21.3	29.7	12.6	21.4	41.1	41.2	46.2
Partido de la Revolución Democrática	7.4	6.0	4.1	10.6	2.6	4.0	12.8	11.9	7.3	46.6
Other	2.0	4.2	0.8	2.4	1.6	2.2	1.1	0.9	2.6	37.7
None	41.6	24.5	35.7	43.4	46.2	55.7	50.1	37.2	39.9	40.6
(N)	(6,397)	(798)	(800)	(800)	(800)	(800)	(800)	(799)	(800)	(2,818)

**Table 2** Percentage of survey respondents, by knowledge of abortion reforms/initiatives and opinion about abortion under various circumstance, according to state of residence, Mexico, 2009

Characteristic	Total sample	States where constitution was modified				States with initiatives to modify constitution				
		Baja California	Colima	Morelos	Sonora	Queretaro	State of Mexico	Tabasco	Veracruz	
Aware of reform/initiative to change law	22.8	42.8	19.0	24.5	17.9	14.7	18.0	27.6	18.1	
In favor of the Mexico City law	44.1	38.8	49.9	53.8	31.8	38.4	49.1	37.5	53.0	
Support abortion in the following cases:										
Elective abortion without gestational limits	25.9	23.7	27.5	31.4	22.6	30.4	30.8	13.6	26.7	
Severe fetal malformation	59.8	58.3	55.0	64.9	68.1	59.4	65.3	48.4	59.1	
Pregnancy poses risk to life of woman	65.0	69.5	60.6	69.6	71.4	65.9	66.7	55.0	61.1	
Woman lacks financial means to support child	28.1	25.5	31.3	32.9	26.2	29.0	33.2	19.7	26.9	
Rape	60.2	67.2	45.6	67.9	66.0	61.9	69.6	45.2	58.4	
Pregnancy poses risk to health of woman	59.9	69.2	50.8	66.4	61.6	63.7	58.4	47.7	61.4	
Woman is HIV+ or has AIDS	56.0	63.9	50.8	52.6	67.6	50.0	64.2	45.1	54.2	
Failure of contraceptive method	22.9	20.3	26.7	25.9	20.7	25.9	26.7	12.6	24.0	
(N)	(6,397)	(798)	(800)	(800)	(800)	(800)	(800)	(799)	(800)	



**Table 3** Odds ratios from logistic regression models testing correlates of supporting first-trimester elective abortion, eight Mexican states (N = 6,397), 2009

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Percent of respondents in support of first-trimester elective abortion
Awareness of reform/initiative to change law				
No (r)	1.00	1.00	1.00	41.1
Yes	1.82***	1.75***	1.72***	54.2
State				
Baja California (r)	1.00	1.00	1.00	38.8
Colima	1.83***	2.05***	2.12***	49.9
Morelos	2.07***	2.18***	2.32***	53.8
Sonora	0.85	0.90	0.96	31.8
Queretaro	1.17	1.22	1.34	38.4
State of Mexico	1.78***	1.81***	1.96***	49.1
Tabasco	1.04	1.12	1.18	37.5
Veracruz	2.08***	2.38***	2.55***	53.0
Age (years)				
18–19 (r)	—	1.00	1.00	47.2
20–29	—	1.17	1.13	50.4
30–39	—	0.97	0.93	45.1
40–49	—	0.92	0.88	43.3
50–59	—	0.78	0.74	38.0
60+	—	0.61**	0.58**	33.5
Year of schooling				
≤9 (r)	—	1.00	1.00	40.2
10+	—	1.39***	1.41***	51.0
Marital status				
Formerly married (r)	—	1.00	1.00	34.8
Currently married	—	1.18	1.15	43.5
Never married	—	1.04	1.05	48.7
Number of children				
None (r)	—	1.00	1.00	49.5
At least one	—	0.91	0.90	42.4
Occupation				
Unemployed (r)	—	1.00	1.00	45.2
Currently working	—	1.02	1.04	42.3
Homemaker	—	0.92	0.93	51.2
Student	—	1.28	1.25	38.2
Retired	—	1.00	1.00	42.2
Religious service attendance				
Almost never or never (r)	—	1.00	1.00	44.9
Once per month	—	1.09	1.07	48.0
Frequently	—	0.89	0.87	41.3
Political party affiliation				
None (r)	—	—	1.00	37.7
Partido Acción Nacional	—	—	1.46***	47.8
Partido Revolucionario Institucional	—	—	1.35***	46.2
Partido de la Revolución Democrática	—	—	1.29***	46.6
Other	—	—	0.92	40.6

\*\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . — = Not applicable. (r) = Reference category.

## Multivariate Analysis of Correlates of Abortion Opinion

We performed bivariate analysis to assess associations between sociodemographic characteristics, abortion opinion, and awareness of the latest reforms/initiatives (results not shown). All significant variables were included in the multivariate models shown in Table 3; rural/urban residence, sex, and religion were excluded from the multivariate analysis.

Model 1 of our multivariate logistic regression illustrates the association between having a favorable opinion about legalizing elective first-trimester abortion and (a) awareness of reforms/initiatives and (b) living in a particular state (we controlled for no other variables). Our assumption was that awareness that legal reforms are under discussion or have been approved would, on average, increase the likelihood of having a favorable opinion about abortion, as we have seen in other public opinion surveys carried out in Mexico City (García et al. 2004; Palermo et al. 2010). Baja California was considered the reference state because it was the first to pass a reform. The results in Model 1 show that awareness of the reforms/initiatives was significantly associated with being in favor of first-trimester elective abortion. Survey participants living in Colima, the State of Mexico, Morelos, and Veracruz were more likely to be in favor of first-trimester elective abortion, compared with those living in Baja California. No statistically significant association was found between awareness of the reforms/initiatives and being in support of first-trimester elective abortion among respondents from Queretaro, Sonora, and Tabasco.

In the second model, we added controls for age, education, marital status, number of children, occupation, and frequency of religious service attendance. Awareness of reforms/initiatives was again significantly associated with greater odds of supporting the Mexico City law and residing in the same four of the seven comparison states. The other variable significantly associated with greater odds of favoring the Mexico City law was more education (ten or more years), whereas older age (60 years or more) was significantly associated with lower odds of support.

Model 3 added political party affiliation. This variable can influence abortion opinion because the three most influential political parties in Mexico maintain different positions concerning abortion and had begun campaigning for state elections at the time of data collection in 2009. Identifying with any of the three major political parties was significantly associated with having a favorable opinion about the Mexico City law compared with lack of affiliation. “Other” political party affiliation was

negatively associated with favorable abortion opinion, but this result was not statistically significant. After controlling for political party affiliation, the positive association between awareness of reform/initiatives and favorable abortion opinion remained statistically significant.

## Discussion

This study is the first to investigate public opinion concerning abortion in Mexican states that have proposed initiatives or passed reforms to prevent legalization of first-trimester elective abortion. We found that only a minority of the participants were aware of recent reforms/initiatives in eight states intended to prohibit legal abortion. The majority of respondents in each state held more liberal opinions about when abortion should be legal than either the reforms/initiatives or previous constitutional amendments allowed. Majorities supported legal abortion in cases of rape, risk to the woman's life or health, and severe fetal malformations. Legal abortion under all of these circumstances, however, is in jeopardy under the new reforms. Of the two questions asked about elective abortion, greater proportions of respondents agreed with the Mexico City law (first-trimester elective abortion) than with elective abortion without regard to gestational limit.

As expected in such geographically dispersed and socioeconomically diverse states, we found significant differences between the states in awareness of the latest reforms/initiatives as well as in abortion opinion. We assume that the type and extent of information that survey participants were exposed to regarding the abortion initiatives/reforms varied, although this exposure could not be measured directly. The states of Mexico and Morelos, perhaps in part due to their proximity to the capital, were more likely to support abortion, compared with the southern state of Tabasco or the northern state of Sonora.

The multivariate analysis revealed that, for most participants, greater awareness of the latest reforms and initiatives was significantly associated with greater odds of supporting the Mexico City law. This may suggest that these participants would also be more likely to oppose the latest initiatives to ban abortion entirely, although our survey did not ask this question explicitly. Greater awareness or knowledge of existing abortion laws has been shown to be positively associated with more favorable abortion opinion in previous public opinion studies in Mexico (Becker, García, and Larsen 2003; García et al. 2004; Yam, Dries-Daffner, and García 2006; Palermo et

al. 2010; Wilson et al. 2009) and elsewhere in the region (Martin, Hyacenth, and Suite 2007).

Higher educational attainment was significantly associated with support for the Mexico City law, a relationship that also has been demonstrated in previous studies (Becker et al. 2003; García et al. 2004; Wilson et al. 2009). People with more advanced education may have greater access to information about abortion and the health consequences of restrictive legislation.

Contrary to the findings of previous public opinion studies in Mexico (Becker et al. 2003; García et al. 2004; García et al. 2007; Wilson et al. 2009), sex and frequency of religious service attendance were not significant predictors of abortion opinion in our study. Additionally, the significant associations between awareness of the reforms/initiatives and opinion about the Mexico City law did not hold for residents of Sonora or Tabasco and only held in Queretaro once we controlled for political party affiliation. A few possible explanations exist for the lack of significant association in those states. At the time of the survey, Sonora had passed reforms quite a bit earlier, and Tabasco had a pending initiative. Evidence from public opinion studies in Mexico City indicates that once a constitutional amendment concerning abortion is in place, it gets more public support, which may reflect social desirability to support legal behavior (Wilson et al. 2011). In Sonora and Tabasco, the combination of reforms in place and the underlying social conservatism may help explain the lack of significance of the association between awareness of the reforms and opinion about the Mexico City law. In general, residents from these states had the lowest levels of support for abortion under the other legal circumstances. The absence of a significant association may actually indicate a negative association between greater awareness and favorable opinion about elective abortion; this would need to be examined in a future study.

The way the abortion debate is framed—as a political or moral issue or as one of reproductive health and rights—can shape public opinion (Lamas and Bissell 2000). Determining respondents' sources of information on abortion reform or the Mexico City law (paid political ads, health information, friends) or the frequency of exposure to these sources was beyond the scope of this study. Participants in Sonora and Tabasco may have been exposed to more antichoice information than people in other states, which may have shaped their opinions about the Mexico City law. We should not assume, however, that a linear relationship exists between greater awareness of a particular reform and more or less favorable opinions about it. Rather, some participants

may have already made up their minds about the circumstances under which abortion should be legal, and awareness of state reforms and initiatives may not have significantly influenced their views. Further, we may not have controlled adequately for sources of information that influenced public opinion. Qualitative research on the types of information people receive and how that influences public opinion about abortion would help illuminate this relationship. Future state-level surveys in Mexico should explore in greater detail the relationship between state residency, individual participation in local politics and other community activities, and abortion public opinion.

Finally, self-reported affiliation with any of the three major political parties was associated with support for first-trimester elective abortion. This finding suggests that Mexicans do not necessarily agree with their political party on the issue of abortion; for example, those who self-identified with PAN, a party with an antichoice platform, supported the Mexico City law nevertheless. This may suggest that political party affiliation is not a strong indicator of opinion regarding sexual and reproductive rights. Future studies could collect data on participants' past voting behavior as a more accurate indicator of political preference and its relationship to abortion opinion.

This study has several limitations. First, because it relies on cross-sectional data, causal inferences regarding the relationship between awareness of the reforms and opinion about the Mexico City law cannot be drawn with certainty. Second, because our data were drawn from a large quantitative survey, we were unable to explore in depth the variations by state in public awareness and opinion. Third, how certain questions were interpreted may have varied among respondents. For example, some respondents might interpret severe fetal malformations as incompatible with human life, and this discrepancy may have affected our results. Finally, we were unable to assess the nature, sources, or scope of the information the public had been exposed to regarding the latest reforms and initiatives, and so we were unable to determine the veracity of the information. Future studies should explore in greater depth the sources of information about reforms/initiatives, as well as other factors shaping abortion public opinion, such as religiosity.

Mexico will hold presidential elections in 2012. The states and federal Congress, with pressure from the Mexican Catholic hierarchy, have declared that abortion will be a key topic of discussion between the contending parties. Furthermore, unaffiliated voters in the upcoming elections could be influenced by parties endorsing restrictive abortions policies.

Our research reveals that Mexican public opinion tends to favor legal abortion under certain circumstances, and a significant proportion of the population supports the legalization of elective abortion within the first 12 weeks of gestation. The unexpected finding of the lack of correlation between abortion opinion, religious service attendance, and political party affiliation in Mexico may suggest that opinions on sensitive issues are not as strongly influenced by conservative forces within political parties or by the Catholic hierarchy as had been previously presumed. These and other findings from the study should be of value to politico-legal decisionmakers aiming to incorporate public opinion research into the formulation of legislation and policies in Mexico. Additionally, our study highlights the need for access to reliable information concerning abortion and related legislative initiatives, so that individuals who participate in the abortion debate are informed about the ethical, legal, and public health arguments surrounding the issue.

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